

A Study of Ancestor Worship in Modern Society

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This is an attempt to present a theory to account for the phenomenon of ancestor worship in modern society, from the viewpoint which denies the long-held sociological theory that the development of modern society is a cause of the decline of ancestor worship. At the same time I have sought in this study a foundation for ancestor worship in connection with the structure of modern society, or the consciousness structure of modern people, and in particular the fear deriving from the loss of human relationship. For example, in a previous study, Rollo May has divided the fear into two: one deriving from the loss of ultimate values and the other of death.

Modern society finds itself in a situation which obliges men to suffer intensely the sense of loss of human relationship, which is most basic to the ultimate value of human life, and the fear of death. There may be a variety of means to conquer those fears, but one of them, which is of vital significance, is considered to be the cult of ancestors. As is attested by a number of working data, the substance of consciousness supporting ancestor worship appears to be based not only upon the mere remembrance of ancestors of the specific families (*ie*), which has traditionally been employed for explaining the phenomenon

of ancestor worship, but also upon man's will to reaffirm the source of his own life and to retain his identity. The sphere of operation of this consciousness is none other than the "nuclear family" in contemporary society.

It may be true that the traditional ancestor worship centering around the *ie* has receded into the background, but today a new form of ancestor worship based upon a modern type of family is appearing, and its *raison d'être* is liable to rational explanations, albeit in the hypothetical sense. In modern society a new form of ancestor worship supported by new families has arisen which is in close relationship with the moderner's consciousness of alienation.